

Committee on the  
Conduct of the War

Drawer 10a Commander in Chief

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# Abraham Lincoln as Commander-in-Chief

## Committee on the Conduct of the War

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the  
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

*Transcript July 31, 1862*

**INTERVIEW OF A NEW YORK COMMITTEE  
WITH THE PRESIDENT**

*New York, 31st.* The Tribune's Washington despatch states that the New York Committee laid before Mr. Lincoln the resolution with respect to the desirableness of a more thorough policy in the conduct of the war, which you have heretofore published, and they urged the issuance of orders from the War Department that should tend to quicken recruiting for old regiments. In the course of a conversation on the latter topic, the President said that 100,000 men enlisted in old regiments would be worth more than 300,000 in new organizations, and he sent a note to the War Department requesting the Secretary to issue the orders asked for by the Committee.

# Congress no pleasant prize

By WILL MULLER

Congress has taken its traditional recess so that its Republican members may return to their districts to banquet in memory of Abraham Lincoln and glorify his name.

There is much oratory at such festivities. Each district vies with its neighbor in acquiring the most eloquent speakers with a view to converting voters to the Republican faith.

"I THINK too much reliance is placed in noisy demonstrations, importing speakers from a distance and the like," Lincoln wrote of Republican Party activities to his friend, Andrew McCollen, in 1858.

Republican congressmen are so determined to identify with the Great Emancipator that they have insisted on taking 10 days away from such problems as the Vietnam war, inflation and cresting violence to pay him tribute. It's almost heresy, though good for the soul, to read what Lincoln thought of Congress.

J. G. Randall, in his "Lincoln, the President," relates how a senator once left Congress to go down Pennsylvania Avenue to the White House and abuse Lincoln for his "moderate voice" in war measures.

"Sir," cried the overwrought senator, "you are within one mile of hell!"

"Yes, I know," Lincoln replied. "It is just one mile to the Capitol."

In his July 4, 1861, message to Congress Lincoln gave wry expression to the maximum he expected of that body in the war crisis.

"The people will save their government," he told the joint meeting, "if the government itself will do its part only indifferently well."

HOW CONGRESS harried Lincoln and distracted him and his generals, how it sought to supervise operations and second-guess battles, how it applied partisan judgment to Army leaders, is in school histories.

It created a committee on the conduct of the war. The committee interrupted military campaigns to summon fighting men, taking two million words of testimony filling six volumes to no end but windy distraction.

All this prompted a despairing Lincoln, compelled to battle the Confederacy on one hand and the busybodies in Congress on the other, to remark of a Republican Senate maneuver:

"They wish to get rid of me, and I am sometimes half disposed to gratify them."

Congressional Democrats acceded to the Republican recess on Lincoln's Birthday, expecting a like courtesy when their party programs its Jefferson-Jackson rallies later. Also the 10-day vacation gives them their first op-

portunity since Jan. 20 to come home and recite their accomplishments.

It should be significant that Lincoln instituted the actions which were to live most prominently in history while Congress was away. Those included the first call for volunteers, the blockade, the enlargement of the regular Army, the suspension of habeas corpus, the preliminary emancipation proclamation, the April 15, 1865, pronouncement on postwar policy.

Congressmen come home in the style of the prodigal son to the Lincoln banquets. Their biggest piece of business in 24 days has been to hike their own salaries from \$30,000 to \$42,500.

In the 91st Congress are 19 Republicans and 20 Democrats in the start of their first terms. Lincoln himself served one term in the House, refused to campaign for a second, and explained to a friend in 1846:

"BEING ELECTED to Congress, though I am grateful to our friends for having done it, has not pleased me as much as I expected."

Possibly among the freshmen congressman returning home this Lincoln's Birthday are men equally disillusioned

## to Lincoln



*Handwritten: Handed to me by Bob Cromie*  
**Bob Cromie**

# Lincoln's candor in halting rumors



IN CASE you think that discord between the President and the Congress is something new, or that appearing before a congressional committee is beneath the dignity of the President, consider this information supplied by Ralph G. Newman, owner of the Abraham Lincoln Bookshop and one of the outstanding authorities on Lincoln and the Civil War:

"In the winter of 1862-1863 there is some evidence of a secret movement by some of the radical Republicans to impeach President Lincoln. It was a movement by men who were considered reactionaries by both parties, men who wanted a President obedient to their wishes. Their complaint was that Mr. Lincoln lacked ability and energy, and that he was not pushing the war with sufficient vigor.

"One of the accusations leveled against the President was the allegation that Mrs. Lincoln was connected with Union disasters—that she was indeed a spy for the South in the White House. The talk became so common that a secret morning session was set by the Committee on the Conduct of the War to inquire as to the charge that Mrs. Lincoln was disloyal.

"ONE COMMITTEE member reported on what happened:

" 'We had just been called to order by the chairman when the officer stationed at the committee door came in with a half-frightened expression on his face. Before he had an opportunity to make explanation, we understood the reason for his excitement and were ourselves almost overwhelmed with astonishment. For at the foot of the committee table, standing solitary, his hat in his hands, his form towering, Abraham Lincoln stood. Had he come by some incantation, thus of a sudden appearing before us unannounced, we could not have been more astounded.'

"Carl Sandburg, who covered the incident in his 'War Years,' continued:

" 'There was an almost unhuman sadness in his eyes, and above all an indescribable sense of his complete isolation which the committee member felt had to do with fundamental senses of apparition.'

"The witness went on:

" 'No one spoke, for no one knew what to say. The President had not been asked to come before the committee, nor was it suspected that he had information that we were to investigate reports which, if true, fastened treason upon his family in the White House.'

"The tall visitor spoke at last—slowly, with control, tho with deep sorrow in the tone of voice:

" 'I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, appear of my own volition before this committee of the Senate to say that I, of my own knowledge, know that it is untrue that any of my family hold treasonable communication with the enemy.'

"Sandburg adds:

" 'Having attested this, he went away as silent and solitary as he had come.' "

"THE COMMITTEE member present later recalled:

" 'We sat for some minutes speechless. Then by tacit agreement, no word being spoken, the committee dropped all consideration of the rumors that the wife of the President was betraying the Union. We were so greatly affected that the committee adjourned for the day.' "

Perhaps if President Nixon suddenly appeared before the Watergate committee hearings on his own volition and made a similar simple and sincere statement, much of the continuing flurry of rumor and innuendo that swirls about his possible role in the various conspiracies would have a comparably quick ending.

## Testified before committee

# Recount Lincoln Congress visit

By Philip Warden

Chicago Tribune Press Service

WASHINGTON, June 12—In one of the most dramatic episodes in the history of Congress, President Abraham Lincoln personally appeared and testified before a Senate committee.

Lincoln's action of 110 years ago takes on significance in the light of today's controversy over the question of executive privilege—the doctrine which President Nixon cites as basis for his refusal to appear before congressional committees.

Here is how Carl Sandburg tells of Lincoln's appearance on capitol hill in his book "Lincoln: The War Years":

"AMID the snarling chaos of the winter of 1862-'63, there were indications of a secret movement to impeach President Lincoln and get him out of the White House. Stubbornly, he had followed his own middle course, earning in both parties enemies who, for different reasons, wanted him out of the way. There were radical Republicans who wanted a man obedient to their wishes. There were reactionaries in both parties who hoped that the confusion of an impeachment would slow down the war, bring back habeas corpus and other civil rights."

Sandburg said a number of

prominent men met to find a means by which the president could be impeached and turned out of office.

"Report and gossip finally shaped specific accusations that Mrs. Lincoln was connected with union disasters, that there was a southern spy in the White House who was the wife of the President," Sandburg says.

THE TALK of a woman spy in the White House finally "arrived at the point where Senate members of the committee on the conduct of the war had set a secret morning session for attention to reports that Mrs. Lincoln was a disloyalist," Sandburg recounts.

"One member of the committee told of what happened: 'We had just been called to order by the chairman, when the officer stationed at the committee room door came in with a half-frightened expression on his face. Before he had opportunity to make explanation, we understood the reason for his excitement, and were ourselves almost overwhelmed with astonishment.'

"For at the foot of the committee table, standing solitary . . . his form towering, Abraham Lincoln stood. Had he come by some incantation, thus of a sudden appearing before us unannounced, we could not have been more astounded."

"THERE WAS an 'almost unhuman sadness' in his eyes, and 'above all an indescribable sense of his complete isolation' " which the committee member felt had to do with fundamental senses of the apparition.

"No one spoke, for no one knew what to say," Sandburg wrote. "The President had not been asked to come before the committee, nor was it suspected that he had information that we were to investigate reports, which, if true, fastened treason upon his family in the White House.

"At last, the morning caller spoke slowly, with control, tho a depth of sorrow in the tone of voice:

"I, ABRAHAM LINCOLN, President of the United States, appear of my own volition before this committee of the Senate to say that I, of my own knowledge, know that it is untrue that any of my family hold treasonable communication with the enemy."

Having attested this, Lincoln went away.

The committee member said he and his colleagues "sat for some moments speechless."

"Then, by tacit agreement, no word being spoken, the committee dropped all consideration of the rumors that the wife of the President betrayed the Union. We were so greatly affected that the committee adjourned for the day."

tify, the constitutional issue of whether a President can be subpoenaed being murky (TIME, June 18). But Senator Baker pointed out that Woodrow Wilson, rather than appear before a congressional committee, invited the committee to meet with him,\* and Weicker recalled that a Senate committee during the Civil War had decided to investigate whether Mary Todd Lincoln was a "disloyalist." Then Weicker read from Carl Sandburg's moving account of how that earlier committee's chairman perceived the episode.

"At the foot of the committee ta-

\*Wilson submitted to three hours of committee questioning about the Treaty of Versailles.

ble, solitary, his hat in his hand, Abraham Lincoln stood ... The President had not been asked to come before the committee, nor was it suspected that he had information that we were to investigate reports, which, if true, fastened treason upon his family in the White House. At last, the mourning corpus spoke, slowly, with a depth of sorrow in his voice: 'I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, appear of my own volition before this committee of the Senate to say that I, of my own knowledge, know that it is untrue that any of my family hold treasonable communication with the enemy.'

"Having attested this, he went away

as silent and solitary as he had come. We sat for some moments speechless and, by tacit agreement, no word being spoken, the committee dropped all consideration of the rumors."

It remains to be seen whether Richard Nixon will elect to emulate the first Republican President and come before the Ervin committee, "solitary, his hat in his hand," to answer the charges about Watergate. It would certainly require more than a simple, solemn declaration of his innocence. The scene is difficult to imagine, to be sure, but in the end it may become the only way to restore any degree of public trust in his presidency.

From *Time* Magazine, July 9, 1973, *Dean's Case Against the President*

Only this page references Lincoln, and is the subject of McMurtry's subsequent correspondence with *Time* and Senator Wiecker.

Full article available in the Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection at the Allen County Public Library.



Weicker

NOTE: ORIGINAL LETTER + REPLY  
FILED IN MISC. DOCUMENTS  
IN SAFE

Emeritus

July 6, 1973

Senator Lowell Weicker  
U. S. Senate  
Washington, D.C.

Dear Senator Weicker:

On page 13, the July 9, 1973 issue of Time quotes your allusion to Abraham Lincoln's visit to Congress to vindicate his wife from charges of disloyalty.

You apparently relied on Sandburg, who is, alas, a notoriously unreliable source. We doubt that the incident ever occurred. The only evidence for its occurrence stems from a clipping in the files of the Lincoln Library and Museum that appeared in a Washington newspaper sometime between 1904 and 1916 (the article was so clipped that the name and date of the newspaper do not appear).

The author of the article, one E. J. Edwards, says the "anecdote" (His word) came from General Thomas L. James. At the time James was Postmaster General in Garfield's cabinet an unnamed "member of the Senate committee on the conduct of the war in Lincoln's first administration" allegedly related the story of Lincoln's surprise appearance.

The anecdote seems very doubtful. For one thing, the Committee on the Conduct of the War was a joint committee, not a Senate committee. The biographies of Senate members of the committee do not mention the incident. Time alleges that the story came from the "committee's chairman." The chairman was Senator Benjamin Wade of Ohio, but his biographers, H. L. Trefousse and A. G. Riddle, make no mention of the incident.

Mary Lincoln's biographer, Ruth Painter Randall, questioned the likelihood that the event ever occurred, and she did this reluctantly because she liked to picture Lincoln's wife as a victim maligned by unfair criticism. The story would have fit Mrs. Randall's argument

Senator Lowell Weicker  
July 6, 1973  
Page Two

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Yours truly,

The Staff  
Lincoln Library and Museum  
Lincoln National Life Foundation  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

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## United States Senate

SELECT COMMITTEE ON  
PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES  
(PURSUANT TO S. RES. 60, 93D CONGRESS)

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

July 23, 1973

The Staff  
Lincoln Library and Museum  
Lincoln National Life Foundation  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

Dear Staff:

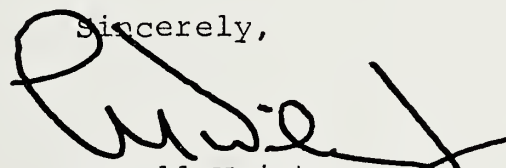
Many thanks for your letter of July 6th.

In regard to your comment on my allusion to Abraham Lincoln's visit to Congress to vindicate his wife from charges of disloyalty, I certainly appreciate all the information you sent me.

However, despite the fact that the reference cannot be substantiated, I feel that it did accomplish what I wanted.

With warmest wishes.

Sincerely,



Lowell Weicker, Jr.  
United States Senator

LW/sa

Emeritus

July 6, 1973

TIME

Time & Life Building  
Rockefeller Center  
New York, New York 10020

Dear Sirs:

On page 13 of the July 9, 1973 issue of Time, you quote Senator Lowell Weicker's allusion to Abraham Lincoln's visit to Congress to vindicate his wife from charges of disloyalty.

Senator Weicker apparently relied on Sandburg, who is, alas, a notoriously unreliable source. We doubt that the incident ever occurred. The only evidence for its occurrence stems from a clipping in the files of the Lincoln Library and Museum that appeared in a Washington newspaper sometime between 1904 and 1916 (the article was so clipped that the name and date of the newspaper do not appear).

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TIME

July 6, 1973

Page Two

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Yours truly,

The Staff  
Lincoln Library and Museum  
Lincoln National Life Foundation  
Fort Wayne, Indiana

# TIME

THE WEEKLY NEWSMAGAZINE

TIME & LIFE BUILDING

ROCKEFELLER CENTER

NEW YORK 10020

ISABEL KOURI

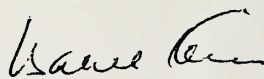
EDITORIAL OFFICES

August 13, 1973

Dear Mr. McMurtry:

As you may know we recently received a letter from the staff of the Lincoln Library giving us documentation for the refutation of Carl Sandburg's description of President Lincoln's visit to Congress. This is a most interesting controversy, and while we could not find the space to publish the letter in TIME, we have made careful note of its contents for our reference files. We hope you will convey our appreciation to the staff.

Sincerely,



Isabel Kouri

Mr. R. Gerald McMurtry  
The Lincoln National Life Foundation  
1301 South Harrison Street  
Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801  
IK:grs

## Responsive President

By volunteering to appear before a committee of the House of Representatives to answer questions about the pardon he granted to Richard Nixon, President Ford has set an admirable example of open and responsive government. Such readiness to be accountable to Congress gains in significance by its contrast to the Nixon Administration's defiant custom of hiding behind the stone wall of executive privilege.

Mr. Ford's ability to provide full answers to the questions put to him by the Subcommittee on Criminal Justice is essential to understanding of the motives and considerations behind his decision to pardon Mr. Nixon before the judicial process had even begun to run its course. No convincing explanation, for example, has yet been given of why the pardon was granted unconditionally, even though a White House lawyer had apparently been dispatched to Mr. Nixon's California residence with orders to arrange for some acknowledgment of the former President's guilt as a precondition.

Rumors and reports about direct and second-hand appeals to Mr. Ford by Nixon loyalists in and out of the White House remain to be dealt with, as does the advisory role, if any, played by Nelson Rockefeller who had already endorsed a pardon at a time when Mr. Ford himself still publicly maintained that such a step should not be considered in anticipation of forthcoming judicial procedures.

In deciding to appear personally to answer questions, the President is in the good company of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln who also testified personally before Congressional committees—Mr. Lincoln, like Mr. Ford, having volunteered to do so. Entirely apart from the important issues under consideration, the Chief Executive's appearance on Capitol Hill ought to be a signal to Mr. Ford's official family in the White House and throughout his Administration. Far from demeaning the Presidency and other high offices of public trust—as Mr. Nixon protested so unconvincingly while dug in behind his barricades of executive privilege—Mr. Ford's

## Visit of President To Congress Panel To Be 2d in History

*Special to The New York Times*

WASHINGTON, Oct. 1—President Ford's scheduled testimony before a house subcommittee would mark only the second time that an incumbent President had appeared in person before a panel of Congress, according to research done last year by the Library of Congress.

The only precedent, the research showed, was an appearance by Abraham Lincoln in 1862 to explain to the House Judiciary Committee how The New York Herald was able to publish his State of the Union Message before the speech had been delivered.

Last night, the White House said that George Washington had testified about an abortive expedition against Indians, but the research shows that Washington only wrote a letter to an

Washington did, in fact, testify before the entire Senate in 1789 on the subject of Indian treaties.

In Carl Sandburg's biography of Lincoln, he described an incident in which the President supposedly appeared before a Congressional panel to denounce rumor that his wife was a Confederate sympathizer. Most historians have concluded that no such incident occurred.

Theodore Roosevelt testified twice before panels of Congress after he had left office, once on the subject of his campaign contributions and the other during an investigation of the United States Steel Corporation.







# Lincoln Lore

January, 1975

Bulletin of The Lincoln National Life Foundation...Mark E. Neely, Jr., Editor. Published each month by The Lincoln National Life Insurance Company, Fort Wayne, Indiana 46801.

Number 1643

## Abraham Lincoln Did NOT Defend His Wife Before the Committee on the Conduct of the War

We are witnessing a Lincoln myth in the making, and it provides a rare opportunity to see what cultural forces are necessary to promote to the status of popular myth one of the many obscure and doubtful stories about the sixteenth President. The event in question is Abraham Lincoln's alleged visit to a secret session of a congressional committee investigating rumors that Mary Todd Lincoln was leaking military secrets to the Confederacy.

### I. Origins of the Story

Lincoln's visit was first described in an article which appeared in a Washington, D.C., newspaper sometime after 1905 (the article refers to the "late" John Hay, who died in 1905). The author, E. J. Edwards, attributed the "anecdote" to Thomas L. James, who had heard it "at the time he was Postmaster General in Garfield's cabinet" from a "member of the Senate committee on the conduct of the war in Lincoln's first administration." Edwards's article continued:

"You doubtless remember," said the senator to Gen. James, "that during a crucial period of the war many malicious stories were in circulation, based upon the suspicion that Mrs. Lincoln was in sympathy with the Confederacy. These reports were inspired by the fact that some of Mrs. Lincoln's relatives were in the Confederate service. At last reports that were more than vague gossip were brought to the attention of some of my colleagues in the Senate. They made specific accusation that Mrs. Lincoln was giving important information to secret agents of the Confederacy. These reports were laid before my committee and the committee thought it an imperative duty to investigate them . . . One morning our committee purposed taking up the reports that imputed disloyalty to Mrs. Lincoln. The

sessions of the committee were necessarily secret . . . [Suddenly] at the foot of the table, standing solitary, his hat in his hand, his tall form towering above the committee members, Abraham Lincoln stood . . . The President had not been asked to come before the committee, nor was it suspected that he had information that we were to investigate the reports, which, if true, fastened treason upon his family in the White House.

"At last Lincoln . . . said:

"I, Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States, appear of my own volition before this committee of the Senate to say that I, of my own knowledge, know that it is untrue that any of my family hold treasonable communication with the enemy."

"... we sat for some moments speechless. Then by tacit agreement, no word being spoken, the committee dropped all consideration of the rumors that the wife of the President was betraying the Union . . . We were so greatly affected that the committee adjourned for the day."

Edwards's article, the original title of which is clipped from the copy of the article in the Lincoln Library and Museum collection, was privately republished as a pamphlet entitled *The Solitude of Abraham Lincoln* by Gilbert A. Tracy in Putnam, Connecticut in 1916. A statement by Tracy in pen on the title page says that only thirty copies were made, and a pencilled statement made on the cover at a later date claims that only sixteen were printed. No alterations were made in the story, and it was published, according to the title page, by permission of the author.

The story would very likely have disappeared into the obscurity typical of stories from rare pamphlets had Emanuel



*Thomas L. James*

Courtesy of The New-York Historical Society, New York City  
FIGURE 1.



Hertz's *Abraham Lincoln: A New Portrait* (New York: Horace Liveright, 1931) not repeated it (on pages 238-239). Carl Sandburg probably picked it up from Hertz; he did not quote Edwards verbatim, as Hertz had, but the story appears in the second volume of Sandburg's *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1939), pages 199-200. In a chapter about the events of late 1862 and early 1863, Sandburg said that "Senate members of the Committee on the Conduct of the War had set a secret morning session for attention to reports that Mrs. Lincoln was a disloyalist." The poet thus added to Edwards's anecdote a date and one subtle embellishment which will be discussed later.

Again the story seemed likely to vanish from popular consciousness. Despite the fact that it was ready-made ammunition for Mary Lincoln's apologists, the first of a long line of these, Ruth Painter Randall, discredited the account. Her *Mary Lincoln: Biography of a Marriage* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1953) related the story but admitted that the "evidence is too vague and in part inaccurate . . . to justify an established historical conclusion that this incident occurred. One cannot accept Lincoln's words literally from such a long-delayed, indirect account and the dramatization is highly seasoned. The thought comes to mind that this story might be a confused version of Lincoln's interviewing members of the House Judiciary Committee in regard to the Wickoff-Watt imbroglio." Mrs. Randall had seen the story in Hertz's book, and then checked the original clipping in the Lincoln National Life Foundation collection. She used her sources scrupulously and threw cold water on the story, but her condemnation was mild and rather tentative; she felt that the story had at least the virtue of pointing "up the ghastly situation created by the idea that Mrs. Lincoln was disloyal." As a partisan of Mrs. Lincoln, Mrs. Randall wanted to believe it, but her respect for historical rigor prevented her from doing so.

Early in July, 1973, Connecticut Senator Lowell Weicker read Carl Sandburg's version of the story into the records of the Senate Watergate hearings and into the political conscience of the nation. Weicker read the anecdote before a national television audience to show that the first Republican President had been willing to give testimony before a congressional committee. Senator Weicker's staff may have picked the story up from the newspapers. Bob Cromie had printed the anecdote as supplied by Lincoln-student Ralph Newman in the *Chicago Tribune* of June 2, 1973. The story was repeated by Philip Warden eleven days later in the same newspaper.

This political use of the Edwards-James-Sandburg story gave it a currency that no attempt simply to dramatize Lincoln's beleaguered presidency or to defend Mrs. Lincoln's reputation could have provided. Almost overnight Lincoln's visit to the Committee became not an obscure anecdote but an important moral, if not legal, precedent. Weicker willingly quoted the statement that Lincoln "had not been asked to come before the committee." Senator Ervin, Chairman of the Senate Watergate Committee, never held that the Committee could issue a subpoena for President Nixon's testimony, and the Lincoln story was left as a moral example of willingness to volunteer information. President Ford has tacitly testified to the power of the moral example by appearing voluntarily before a congressional committee himself.

## II. Is the Story True?

To date, Ruth Painter Randall is the principal, if reluctant, challenger of the story's truthfulness. She noted immediately that the Committee on the Conduct of the War was a *joint* committee made up of members from both houses of Congress. Thus E.J. Edwards's original article erred in terming it a Senate committee. Here Sandburg's embellishment becomes important. He also knew the Committee was a joint committee, but the poet in him liked the drama and solemnity of the occasion. Although he did not quote the story entirely from Edwards (via Hertz), Sandburg did seize on such dramatic passages from the original account as these for their literary impact: "Had he come by some incantation, thus of a sudden appearing before us unannounced, we could not have been more astounded"; the president's eyes revealed "above all an indescribable sense of his complete isolation." Therefore Sandburg's quiet alteration of the original words "member of the Senate committee" to "Senate members of the Committee" is proof that he did not possess Mrs. Randall's

respect for historical rigor and discipline; he wrote what he wanted to believe and was willing to alter the record to fit it. In so doing, he also gave the story new life, for he thus eliminated the one glaring error which would have tipped off everyone thereafter that the story was based on very flimsy evidence. Even the most cursory glance at the multi-volume reports of the Committee on the Conduct of the War reveals that they were signed by House members as well as Senate members.

Sandburg, however, nearly made a serious error of his own by claiming that the Committee "set a secret morning session" to investigate the rumors. Edwards had said that the Committee's sessions were "necessarily secret." In fact, *all* sessions of the Committee on the Conduct of the War were held in secret. As a committee set up to investigate military operations during wartime, it could hardly have held *public* sessions with any hope of gaining testimony from the generals it interviewed. Edwards's version, of course, left open the possibility that *all* sessions were secret; Sandburg's version came nearer implying that this session was unique for its secrecy.

There are more reasons to doubt the story than these. Sandburg, probably for stylistic reasons, eliminated Edwards's remark that the anecdote had been "related to Gen. Thomas L. James at the time he was Postmaster General in Garfield's Cabinet." This time unconsciously, Sandburg considerably improved on the original by expanding the period of time in which the anecdote could have been told. According to the original version, however, this time was very limited, for Garfield was President for only six months, being assassinated in September of the first year of his administration. Postmaster General James, then, had to hear the anecdote from a Senate member of the Committee on the Conduct of the War in 1881.

*The problem is that most of these men were dead by then.* Senator Benjamin Franklin Wade of Ohio, Chairman of the Committee, died in 1878. Senator Zachariah Chandler, who also served on the Committee throughout the war years, died in 1879. Tennessee's Andrew Johnson, who served on the Committee only until he became military governor of Tennessee in 1862, died in 1875. Senator Joseph A. Wright of Indiana also served on the Committee for a brief period, but he died in 1867. Only two other senators ever served on the Committee. One was Pennsylvania's Charles Rollin Buckalew, who was not elected to the Senate until 1863. The other was Oregon's Benjamin Franklin Harding, who served in the Senate only after December 1, 1862 (he filled the seat vacated by the death of Lincoln's friend Edward D. Baker). Buckalew and Harding both lived until 1899.

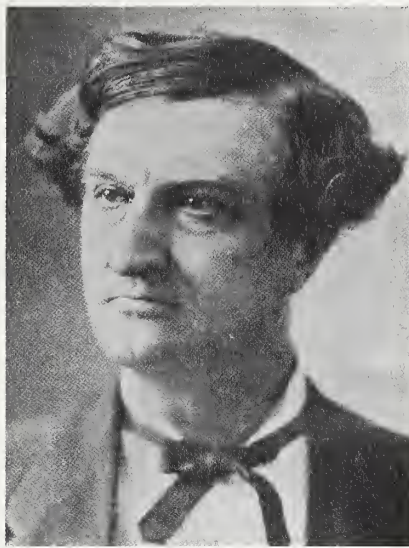
If Thomas L. James heard the anecdote in 1881 from a Senator who had been a member of the Committee on the Conduct of the War, he heard it from Buckalew or Harding. Buckalew seems an unlikely candidate because he was a Democrat. James was a long-time Republican, and it is doubtful that he had any special relationship with Buckalew. The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War could meet without a quorum. In practice, this meant that no Democratic members of the Committee had to be present at the sessions, and critics of the Committee frequently complained that the minority members were ignored. It seems very doubtful indeed that Republicans would have invited Buckalew to be present at a meeting discussing rumors which, if true, would have doomed the Republican administration and probably destroyed the party. Moreover, Buckalew left the Senate for good after his one term. If James heard the story from this Democrat, either the Postmaster General travelled to Pennsylvania to see him, or Buckalew travelled to Washington, for Buckalew returned to Washington as a Representative only in 1887.

B.F. Harding, on the other hand, was a Republican like James; this fact increases the possibility of intimacy with James and the all-important possibility that Harding might have been privy to a meeting of such critical importance to the Republican party as the one Edwards and James described. However, Harding served only one term as United States Senator. According to a biographical sketch supplied by the Oregon Historical Society, Harding "retired" to Oregon after 1865 and died there thirty-four years later. He did not hold any national office, elective or appointive, after 1865. Unless James (a New Yorker) visited Oregon or Harding visited Washington, it is impossible for James to have heard the story from this, the only Republican senator who had served on the

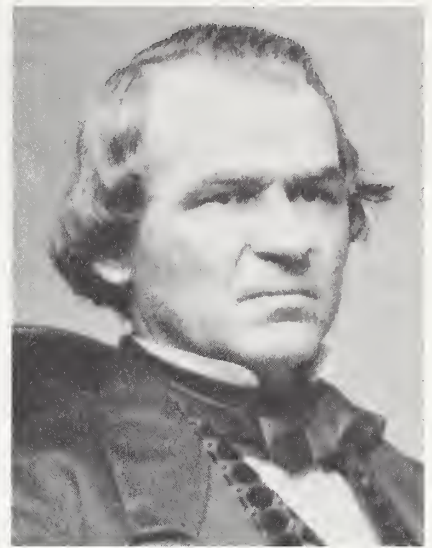




Benjamin F. Wade

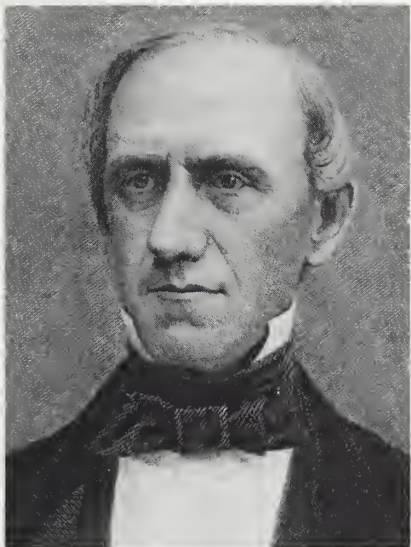


Zachariah Chandler



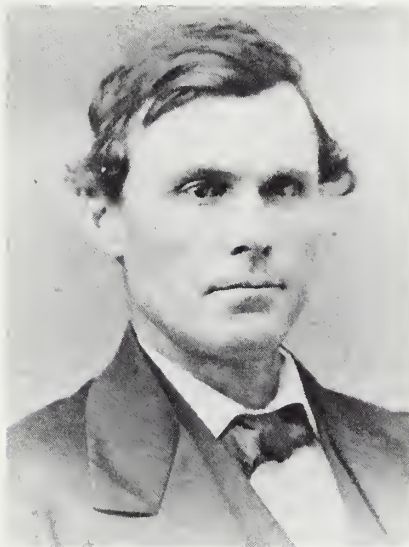
*Pictures from the Lincoln National Life Foundation*

Andrew Johnson



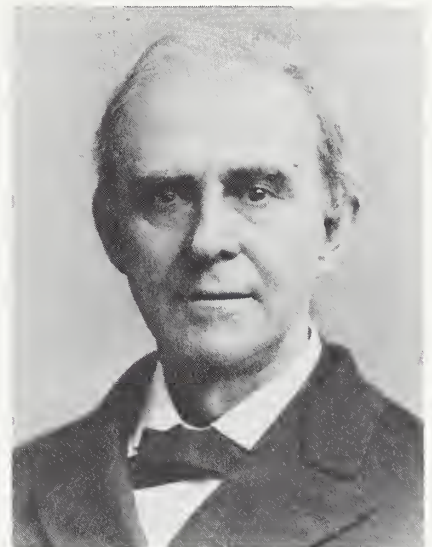
*From the Lincoln National Life Foundation*

Joseph A. Wright



*From the Oregon Historical Society,  
Portland*

Benjamin F. Harding



*From the Historical Society of Pennsylvania,  
Philadelphia*

Charles R. Buckalew

## FIGURE 2. COMMITTEE ON THE CONDUCT OF THE WAR, SENATE MEMBERS

The popular view of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War stems primarily from T. Harry Williams's first book, *Lincoln and the Radicals* ([Madison]: University of Wisconsin Press, 1941). Written with the flamboyance and combativeness of youth, *Lincoln and the Radicals* bristles with sharp characterizations and strong language. Members of the more anti-slavery wing of the Republican party are consistently called "Jacobins"; Thaddeus Stevens was "caustic, terrifying, clubfooted"; the radicals were "in the embarrassing, and often sinister, position of regarding Union defeats on the battlefield as helpful to their cause." Against the onslaught of these Huns, Abraham Lincoln was, "Like the Lucretia threatened with ravishment, he averted his fate by instant compliance." The Committee's popular reputation fell to such a low level that Harry S. Truman claimed in his *Memoirs* in 1955 that, when he was a Senator during World War II, he set up a congressional investigation in such a way as to avoid the errors of that earlier congressional committee, which had been "of material assistance to the Confederacy." Lincoln's image changed before that of the Committee did, and historians came increasingly to see President Lincoln as an assertive and adept politician who steered the country's course between the radicals and the conservatives in the party. Thus the Committee was still seen as malign in nature, but it was no longer deemed to have influential and inquisitorial power over Union policy. Hans L. Trefousse's article, "The Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War: A Reassessment," *Civil War History*, X (March, 1964), 5-19, thus reversed Williams's view of the relationship between the President and the Committee: "In many ways he used the group, taking advantage of its impatience in a manner so skillful as to bring about great reforms despite conservative opposition." To date, there is no full-length study of the work of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War, although the records of the testimony given before the Committee have been mined by numerous military historians. Such a study, especially if done with a careful eye to distinctions between decisions based on military considerations and decisions based on political considerations, would serve a useful purpose.



Committee who was still alive in 1881.

Examined closely, the story of the Lincoln visit to the Committee on the Conduct of the War vanishes after improbabilities are stacked on improbabilities. To narrow the evidence to manageable form for verification is a relatively simple task. Ignoring Edwards's mistake about the make-up of the Committee on the Conduct of the War, the curious student can very quickly show that only two men, one a Democrat, neither important figures in Congress or on the Committee (which was dominated by its energetic chairman), could possibly have told James the story. Both had been out of national public office for over a decade by 1881. The man in nearby Pennsylvania was a Democrat who probably would not have been present at the alleged session; the Republican lived a continent apart from Washington, D.C.

### III. Why Believe It?

The remarkable thing is less that the evidence proves flimsy upon examination than that no one has bothered particularly to examine it. Myths feed on a greater willingness to use a story than to study it. Over the years, the Edwards-James story has served several different causes.

Almost everything written to date on the Committee on the Conduct of the War stems from the period when the abolitionists were taking a beating at the hands of American historians and when every effort was made to delineate a gulf between those Republicans with abolitionist leanings and their President. Edwards's own anecdote was largely free of taking sides in the factional dispute. Edwards said nothing harsh about the Committee, and indeed the story is supposed to have come from a member of that very Committee. Yet it was easily adaptable in other hands to that anti-abolitionist animus, and it was to that factional end that Sandburg used the story. He prefaced it with a description of "the snarling chaos of the winter of 1862-63." Amidst mutterings of "a secret movement to impeach President Lincoln," Sandburg said, "Stubbornly had he followed his own middle course, earning in both parties enemies who for different reasons wanted him out of the way." Conveniently, the names of the "radical Republicans who took part in the secret movement, . . . could only be guessed." Edwards's anecdote, though this was not its original intent, was readily adaptable for those who wished to prove the unreasonableness and immoderation of Lincoln's factional opposition.

The anecdote was kept alive by other motives. Although Ruth Painter Randall's biography of Mary Todd Lincoln gave it more dignity than it deserved by saying that it at least showed the sort of problems this Southern First Lady could have, she rejected it. Her followers have been less careful. Irving Stone's *Love Is Eternal* (1954), a sympathetic account of the Lincolns' domestic life, was a novel and could therefore invoke the story in an effort to depict the unfairness and malignity of Mrs. Lincoln's critics (see pages 380-382). Margaret Bassett's *Abraham & Mary Todd Lincoln* (1973), also a sympathetic account of Mrs. Lincoln, cited Mrs. Randall's book in the bibliography but nevertheless said that Mary Todd's character "became so much a public issue that the President was impelled to say to Congress that he guaranteed his wife's loyalty." Ishbel Ross also noted "a deep debt of gratitude to the late Ruth Painter Randall" for her sympathetic research on Mrs. Lincoln. Nevertheless, Ms. Ross's *The President's Wife: Mary Todd Lincoln* (1973) states that "It has become legendary that when he [Lincoln] heard what was afoot, he walked alone to the Capitol and appeared suddenly before the committee."

There are doubtless two forces at work here, perhaps indistinguishably. One reason for the relatively new desire to believe the best of Mary Todd and the worst of her enemies is the feminist movement which is causing a great deal of interest in the role of women in history and which allows us, for example, to see Mary Todd Lincoln's interest in politics as a forward-looking escape from the nineteenth-century female stereotype rather than as an inappropriate meddlesomeness. At the same time, some authors use the story for the sake of an almost Victorian sentimentalism, replacing the First Lady on her dignified pedestal far from the vulgar vipers in Congress. Neither form of Mary Lincoln apologetics, however, was strong enough on its own to launch the story to national popular mythic status.

That leap required powerful political motives, by which I do

not necessarily mean "party" motive (Senator Weicker is, or was, a member of the same party as Presidents Lincoln and Nixon). The fact of the matter is, nevertheless, that the anecdote was again useful to those who wished a standard of presidential accountability different from that of the incumbent President's. Use was still the criterion, and not intellectual curiosity. After President Nixon suggested a parallel between his own beleaguered presidency and Lincoln's, *Time* magazine's Hugh Sidey (in the February 25, 1974 issue) could quote historians Bruce Catton, Richard Current, and David Donald that they found the parallel forced and selective (President Nixon's speech, they said, notably ignored Lincoln's reputation for honesty). Yet *Time* did not bring up a similar battery of Lincoln historians to testify about the alleged appearance before the Committee on the Conduct of the War.

The myth of Lincoln's defense of his wife before Ben Wade's Committee is based on flimsy evidence and a great deal of desire—desire to make the abolitionists look bad, desire to make Mrs. Lincoln's critics seem at once unreasonable and influential, and desire to prescribe a standard of political behavior for today's Presidents. Whatever the merit of these desires, no cause is well served by making precedents from shoddy anecdotes. We have been watching the birth of a myth; let us hope soon to see its quiet demise.



From the Lincoln National Life Foundation

FIGURE 3. Mary Todd Lincoln in 1863

Mary Todd Lincoln (1818-1882), daughter of Robert Smith Todd and Eliza Parker Todd, was born on December 13, 1818, in Lexington, Kentucky. Although there is little information available on the above picture, it was supposedly taken "in the autumn of 1863" and the print was "the right-hand image of a stereograph card published by E. & H.T. Anthony Company in 1865." Mrs. Lincoln is wearing the same mourning attire that she wore for many months after the death of her third son Willie in February, 1862. See *The Photographs of Mary Todd Lincoln*, (1969) by Lloyd Ostendorf.





# Lincoln Lore

January, 1978

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Number 1679

## THURLOW WEED, THE NEW YORK CUSTOM HOUSE, AND MRS. LINCOLN'S "TREASON"

In January, 1975, *Lincoln Lore* published an article proving that Abraham Lincoln did not appear before the Committee on the Conduct of the War to defend his wife from allegations of treason. The source of the erroneous story about Lincoln's appearance was Thomas L. James, a New Yorker who served as Postmaster General in President Garfield's cabinet. It was easy to prove that James could not have heard the story, as he claimed, from a Senator who had been a member of that committee, because all but two of the Senators were dead by the time James claimed to hear the story (1881). Of the remaining two, one was of the opposition party (and would never have sat upon a story that could kill the Republican party), and the other retired to Oregon after one term in the Senate (and had no opportunity to see James).

The story obviously was not true, but where did it come from? Why did this relatively obscure New York politician, whose name otherwise never appeared in the Lincoln story, become the source for this famous Lincoln anecdote? In 1975, there seemed to be no answer to this question. Now it is possible to establish a plausible connection between James and the allegations against Mrs. Lincoln, but to do so will require a historical excursion to the docks of New York City, an examination of a rare pamphlet which Jay Monaghan failed to list in his *Lincoln Bibliography*, and a brief discussion of the seamier side of American politics.

Hardly a patronage prize in nineteenth-century American politics was sought after more ardently than the collectorship of the New York Custom House. As far back as 1841, a correspondent had warned Presidential-hopeful Henry Clay that the position in the New York Custom House was "second only in influence to that of Postmaster-General." By the time of the Civil War, the collector's salary was \$6,340, and he could expect to earn another \$20,000 from fees. The Custom House perhaps employed 1,200 people, all of whom gave two percent of their salaries to the coffers of the party that got them their jobs in the first

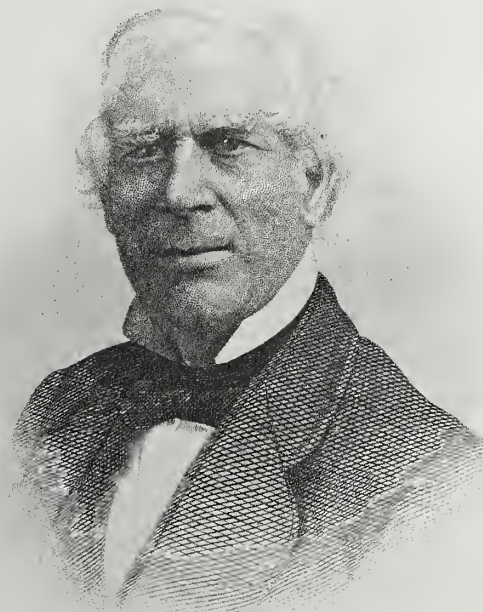
place. It is little wonder that this prize whetted political appetites all over the country.

The New York Custom House was often the focus of unseen intra-party feuds in the Empire State. The period of Lincoln's Presidency was no exception, and a dispute over the Custom House marred New York politics throughout the Civil War. It became the focus of a long-standing feud between the wing of the Republican party controlled by William H. Seward and his henchman Thurlow Weed, on the one hand, and the wing controlled by Horace Greeley and William Cullen Bryant, on the other. There were many smaller feuds and many irregular twists and turns, but the existence of animosity between Seward and Greeley, two men of enormous talents and ambitions, kept the fires of conflict raging in New York Republican politics.

Since Seward was in Washington as Secretary of State for the entire period of Lincoln's Presidency, the local feud in New York centered above all on the personality and politics of Thurlow Weed. When the Lincoln administration first took office, Weed gave the impression that he would be the conduit through which all administration patronage in New York would flow. President Lincoln informed Weed, however, that his motto in such matters was "justice to all" and that Weed did not have Lincoln's "authority to arrange" all such matters in New York.

Endeavoring "to apply the rule of give and take," President Lincoln first appointed Hiram Barney to the collectorship. He was an enemy of Weed's faction, and he appointed, among others, Rufus F. Andrews to the position of Surveyor of the Port of New York, one of the many offices the collector could appoint. Despite their appointments, however, the bulk of the Custom House offices went to partisans of Weed and Seward.

In 1862, Barney used Custom House patronage to help nominate James S. Wadsworth for Governor of New York. Wadsworth was an anti-Weed Republican, and he would run against Democrat Horatio



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 1. Thurlow Weed.



Seymour. Seymour won, and Wadsworth's supporters claimed that Weed had stabbed the Republican candidate in the back. Weed's explanation was different. True, he said, he had supported a renomination of Governor Edwin D. Morgan to run on a platform strictly of support for reuniting the Union. It was also true that Weed had been disappointed by not having the ticket "ballasted" by a candidate for Lieutenant-Governor friendly to Weed, that "Weed men" were carefully excluded from the state committee, that the party headquarters were moved from Albany (Weed's upstate bailiwick) to New York City, and that Wadsworth took an "abolition" line in his speeches despite Weed's pleading with him to take a strictly "Union" line. Nevertheless, when Wadsworth's managers came to Weed out of desperation because they could not raise money for the canvass, he let bygones be bygones and called out his party workers. They went to work too late, but in Weed's estimation he had been faithful to the party when it needed him.

Despite occasional setbacks like the disastrous Wadsworth nomination, Thurlow Weed managed to dominate, if not control completely, the Custom House. This was increasingly true as his enemies in the party and in the Custom House became identified with Salmon P. Chase's bid for the Republican nomination for President in 1864. At a meeting of the state committee from which Chase supporters were absent, Weed managed to get an endorsement for Lincoln's renomination.

In September, Chase's supporters (and many of Weed's enemies) were removed from the Custom House. Collector Barney and Surveyor Rufus Andrews were among those removed. Andrews, who had been a delegate to the convention in Baltimore which nominated Lincoln, took an active part in the campaign for his election anyway. About a month after the election, Andrews published an angry letter in the *New York Tribune* savagely attacking Weed. The Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum has recently acquired a rare copy of the letter as a separately published pamphlet entitled, *Letter of Rufus F. Andrews, Lately Surveyor of the Port of New York, to Thurlow Weed, Lately Editor of the Albany Evening Journal* (New York: 1864). This choice example of nineteenth-century political vituperation discussed the Custom House removals of September. It was published on the eve of Thurlow Weed's trial in a \$50,000 damage suit brought against him by George Opdyke, Mayor of New York City and an adherent of the Greeley faction. The libel suit was an outgrowth of the factional wars in New York and, especially, of Weed's attacks on his rivals. Weed had accused Greeley of involvement, through a friend, in shady speculations in Southern cotton. Weed had charged Isaac Henderson, who was a proprietor of William Cullen Bryant's newspaper and a Lincoln appointee as Navy Agent for New York, of graft and illicit commissions on government contracts. He accused Opdyke of sitting on a committee which awarded a \$190,000 indemnity for a gun factory destroyed in the 1863 draft riots — a gun factory in which Opdyke had a personal financial interest. He said, too, that Opdyke had secret partnerships which led to profits from government contracts for cloth, blankets, clothing, and guns. Opdyke was further alleged to have been involved in the Mariposa Mining Company, which swindled General John C. Frémont. Opdyke pressed a suit for libel, and Andrews's letter appeared at a strategic moment — the day before the trial began.

Andrews claimed that he waited until after the Presidential election to write for fear that "to avenge personal wrongs might damage the cause of Republican government and free institutions" at such a critical time. He said that he met Weed first in the winter of 1857-1858. A young lawyer from New York City, Andrews was flattered by Weed's attention and became one of his partisans ("you and I were thrown a great deal together in politics"). In 1860, Andrews worked for Lincoln's election, and in 1861 he got the reward of the politician who chooses the right Presidential horse; he was appointed Surveyor of the Port of New York. At that point, Andrews said, "I yielded to your entreaties, and gave to you for your friends a large proportion of the best places in my gift."

Then a remarkable thing happened. In 1863, according to Andrews, Weed became "severe in . . . denunciations of the President," proclaimed him an "old Imbecile," judged the war a "failure," and called Lincoln's "advising ministers a corrupt and inefficient cabal." Finally, Andrews continued,

. . . in the spring of 1863, in a public hotel of the city of New

York, you announced to an indiscriminate audience that the wife of the President of the United States was guilty of treasonable conduct, and that by order of the Secretary of War that lady had been banished [from] the Capital; an order which you declared was too long delayed! This occurred in my hearing, and I promptly denied the statement, and branded it as the invention of malicious mendacity.

Mrs. Lincoln arrived in New York that very evening, Andrews said, and he "called to pay her" his "accustomed respects." He also expressed his "surprise at hearing she had been ordered to leave Washington." Astonished and indignant, Mrs. Lincoln demanded the source of the allegation. Andrews told. Weed subsequently "went to Washington, and sued for and received pardon" for his offense, but he never forgave Andrews for his "interposition upon behalf of a slandered woman."

In my zeal to save the first American lady from aspersion [Andrews wrote], I incurred the wrath of her defamer, and from that hour how to destroy me became his chief ambition. Thenceforward your hatred to me had no boundary but your capacity for harm.

Andrews claimed that Weed tried unsuccessfully to keep him from becoming a delegate to the Republican nominating convention in 1864. Andrews quoted Weed's letter in the *Albany Evening Journal* of June 11, 1864, which charged that "a formidable and organized body of ultra abolitionists, 'loyal leaguers,' and radical demagogues appeared at Baltimore, for the purpose, . . . of procuring the nomination of Mr. Dickinson for Vice-President, that Mr. Seward might be excluded from the Cabinet. In this miserable intrigue the ultraists of Massachusetts cuddled with the slime of New York." In particular, Weed noted that "Mr. Lincoln's Surveyor of the port of New York, was among the most unscrupulous traducers of Mr. Lincoln's Secretary of State." To put a New Yorker in the Vice-Presidency would be to remove Seward from the Cabinet, for it was assumed that Lincoln would not have two New Yorkers among his closest advisors. Andrews denied the charge and called Seward "a statesman of whom the nation may be justly proud." Andrews also noted Weed's letter of June 25, 1864, which attacked George Opdyke, who had brought suit against him; Weed asked him to explain "the alleged sale of the office of Surveyor of the port of New York for the moderate sum of \$10,000." Again, Andrews denied the charge and said, "I have been subpoenaed as a witness in the case of Opdyke vs. Weed, and am happy in the belief that you are to be gratified on this point of the 'alleged sale,' whenever the trial of that cause shall take place."

Andrews explained his own downfall as Weed's effort to save his power. Having beaten Weed's forces and served as a delegate in the nominating convention, Andrews was a symbol of Weed's inability to control New York's party. He had to be removed. Andrews charged that Weed had friends tell Lincoln that he would not support him for President in 1864 if Andrews was retained. "I was dismissed, and you triumphed," Andrews concluded, but, "not imputing blame to the President, I devoted my time, money, and efforts to securing his re-election to the office which he adorns."

Such was Andrews's remarkable story, but one thing has been left out, the extreme language he used to tell it. He called Weed a "demagogue," a "hypocrite," and an "ingrate." He recalled Weed's well-known nicknames in opposition circles, "the Old Man," "the Lucifer of the Lobby," and "Fagin the Jew." He referred to Weed's retirement from the editorship of the *Albany Evening Journal* in 1863 and claimed that Weed dodged military service because of a "sprained wrist." "Why don't you emulate the last virtue of Judas Iscariot," Andrews asked, "and hang yourself?" In addition to name-calling, Andrews made a point of Weed's disloyalty to the Lincoln administration. He dated Weed's impatience with the President from the fall of 1862:

According to your expressed views, nothing was right. In civil and military life everything was wrong. The policy of the Government was condemned by you in unmeasured terms. The principles of liberty were sneeringly alluded to by you as weak devices of fanatics and abolitionists. The appointments to office were "not fit to be made."

Certainly, not all that Andrews said was true. For example, Weed's resignation letter claimed "an infirm leg and a broken arm" as reasons for not going to military service; besides, "the



Old Man" was sixty-five years old. On the other hand, Andrews's letter is not without its uses. Harry J. Carman and Reinhard Luthin in *Lincoln and the Patronage* term Weed "a loyal supporter of the administration," and so he was when the chips were down. Yet, he did have his differences with the administration, and Andrews's letter serves to alert us to the nature and degree of those differences.

Weed had his principal differences with what his grandson and memorialist Thurlow Weed Barnes called "the radical section of the Republican party." In his letter announcing his retirement from his newspaper, Weed said:

I differ widely with my party about the best means of crushing the Rebellion. That difference is radical and irreconcilable. I can neither impress others with my views, nor surrender my own solemn convictions. The alternative of living in strife with those whom I have esteemed, or withdrawing, is presented. I have not hesitated in choosing the path of peace as the path of duty.

These differences clearly centered around the Emancipation Proclamation. Though Weed apparently issued an endorsement of the Proclamation as a document which even "the most ungenerous enemies of our cause will be compelled to respect," he must not have cared for it very much. In late 1862 and early 1863, Weed was in the forefront of attempts to unite on a Democrat like Horatio Seymour or General McClellan to lead a Union party on a platform of simply reuniting the Union. After the draft riots, he wrote Henry Raymond, editor of the *New York Times*, offering a 500 dollar con-

tribution "for the relief of the colored people whose dwellings were robbed and who were driven from their employment." In the course of doing so, Weed wrote:

For this persecution of the negro there is divided responsibility. The hostility of Irishmen to Africans is unworthy of men who themselves seek and find in America an asylum from oppression. Yet this hostility would not culminate in arson and murder but for the stimulants applied by fanatics. Journalists who persistently inflame and exasperate the ignorant and the lawless against the negro are morally responsible for these outrages. When all the circumstances have been reviewed, the popular condemnation of those who, while the United States was struggling for its existence, thrust the unoffending negro forward as a target for infuriated mobs, will become general and emphatic.

In South Carolina ultra Abolitionists have been hailed as the "best friends" of secession. Practically, they are the worst enemies of the colored man. Had it not been for the malign influence of these howling fanatics in Congress and with the President, rebellion would not, in the beginning, have assumed such formidable proportions; nor, in its progress, would the North have been divided or the government crippled . . .

The abolitionists had too much influence on Lincoln to suit Thurlow Weed. In the summer and autumn of 1863, he devised a plan to end the war which he submitted to President Lincoln, and there was no abolition in it. It called for the President "to issue a proclamation offering pardon and amnesty to all persons engaged in making war upon the government" as soon as there was a military success. A ninety-day armistice should follow, during which any states which returned to their former allegiance would be fully restored to the privileges they enjoyed before the war. After the armistice, any states refusing pardon would be affected by another proclamation "announcing that in the future prosecution of the war . . . , all territory, whether farms, villages, or cities, shall be PARTITIONED equitably between and among the officers and soldiers by whom it shall be conquered." This was an interesting proposition, for what do we make of Weed's self-conscious opposition to radicalism when his own plan embodied the most radical plan ever proposed by Republican politicians, the partitioning of Southern plantations? The only difference was not in degree of radicalism but in the particular social group to be served. Weed's helped white Northerners and the "radical" proposal helped black Southerners. Each was socially revolutionary, and Weed defended his policy as a social and political revolution:

Your armies [Weed told Lincoln] will be voluntarily and promptly recruited, and their ranks filled with enterprising, earnest yeomen, who have an intelligent reason for entering the army, and who know that the realization of their hopes depends upon their zeal, fidelity, and courage. And by thus providing homes and occupations when the war is over for our disbanded soldiers, you leave scattered over rebel territory an element that may be relied upon for the reconstruction of civil government in the seceded states.

Each plan was potentially bloody:

In answer to those who may object [Weed wrote the President] to the sanguinary feature of this plan, I think it quite sufficient to say that in maritime wars this feature has long been recognized and practiced by all civilized nations. Argosies of merchant vessels, laden with untold millions of the wealth of non-combatants, captured in time of war, are divided as prize money among the officers and sailors by whom they are captured. This, therefore, in all wars upon the oceans and seas of the world, being a part of the law of nations, cannot, in reason or common-sense, be objected to, whereas, in this case, the sufferers are in rebellion against their government, and have been warned of the consequences of rejecting the most liberal offers of peace, protection, and prosperity.

If we may judge by Weed's conservatism, the only difference between the wings of the Republican party was not their relative degree of constitutional flexibility or even sanguinary desires for social revolution; their difference was over whether to help the black man or not.

This is not to say, of course, that the differences between Weed and Andrews, or in general between the Weed faction



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 2. The "Old Man."



and the Greeley faction, involved anything so high-minded and ideological as policy alternatives towards the black race. True, factions do use issues and sometimes use them long enough to become identified over a period of time with one issue or another. But there was a lot more at work in New York's factionalism than philosophical disagreements over policy. Personal ambitions were a major factor; there were only so many offices to be filled, and many talented Republicans vied for them. Here, for example, is Weed's explanation of the opposition to the renomination of Governor Morgan in 1862:

Mr. Greeley still aspired to the Senate, and Governor Morgan, a resident of New York, was in his way. He therefore urged the nomination of General Wadsworth, a western man, of Democratic antecedents, so that the field for the Senate might remain open.

Though jaundiced, of course, this explanation has nothing to do with issues, and it serves to remind us of a factor of overriding importance in New York politics, the upstate-New York City conflict. From the era of the ratification of the United States Constitution to the Civil War to the present day, this rivalry has been great enough to cause threats that the city would secede from the state. In a rough way, one can understand the Seward/Weed-Greeley feud by the simple notion that the former men were from upstate and the latter from New York City.

But in all the welter of confusion over Republican factionalism in New York, we have almost lost track of the accusations about Mrs. Lincoln's treason. The importance of the emergence of that story in this wrangle over patronage is not that it makes the story any more verifiable or understandable, but that it links the story to Thomas L. James. For James got his political education in the New York Custom House. From 1861 to 1864, James served as inspector of customs for the port of New York. Moreover, James was married four times: his first wife was Emily Ida Freeburn, a niece of Thurlow Weed. His second wife was her sister. He was twice married to nieces of Thurlow Weed! We can now understand better how Thomas L. James became the source for the famous

story about Mrs. Lincoln's treason. As a Custom House appointee throughout the war years, James was present to witness the Andrews-Weed feud. Moreover, as Weed's relative by marriage, he had more reason than most to take note of the charge that Weed had accused Mrs. Lincoln of treason. Of course, the story of the President's appearance before the Committee on the Conduct of the War was not included, but the seventeen years that would intervene before James told the story would cloud the memory, alter details, and embellish the story. At last we know that James had some connection to allegations of Mrs. Lincoln's treason.

What of Rufus Andrews? He never got his job back, but it is hard to arouse much pity for him. He was the ultimate spoilsman. Our principal source of knowledge about Andrews is five letters written by him and preserved in the Robert Todd Lincoln Collection in the Library of Congress. They reveal the other side of the pamphleteer who claimed to defend Mrs. Lincoln's honor. One letter is a recommendation for office (July 2, 1862). One is his letter saying he will sacrifice himself "to the insatiable thirst of revenge, and the senile lust of power" for the sake of his party (August 31, 1864). Another, written one day later, places him and a fellow campaigner for Lincoln at Willard's Hotel in Washington, hoping Lincoln will call them to come and explain Andrews's case. The other two letters, though they do not mention any issues or personalities of the Civil War era, are the most revealing of all. Both were written several months before his removal from office. On January 15, 1864, he wrote President Lincoln: "I send you by express this day, a Saddle of English Mutton, received by the Scotia [sic]. I hope the disposition of the English may hereafter be as good as their mutton." And again on February 27, 1864, he sent "by express . . . some English mutton just received from the other side of the world — I hope it may reach you in time for your dinner tomorrow." Whether it was a tribute to Weed's clout or Lincoln's lack of susceptibility to the little favors extended from the New York Custom House, a little English mutton was not enough to keep Rufus Andrews in office.



From the Louis A. Warren  
Lincoln Library and Museum

FIGURE 3. Horatio Seymour and George McClellan as Republicans saw them by 1864.



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# PRESIDENTIAL STUDIES QUARTERLY

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Hamilton said that "Washington opposed fighting a war of posts European style; he preferred mobility" (pp. 298-99).

The Revolutionary war was no picnic. Randall puts it this way: "Wayne's men attacked with particular fury and refused to take prisoners. . . . The Pennsylvanians bayoneted every light infantryman they captured" (p. 339). I was surprised to read that more Germans were fighting in the English army than there were Englishmen. It was also interesting to find out that "Between September 1777 and March 1778 fully one-half of Washington's troops were killed, captured, or wounded or froze to death on patrols, died of camp contagions, deserted, or resigned" (p. 352). Speaking to his departing troops at Princeton, Washington warned that "unless the principles of the federal government [are] properly supported and the powers of the union increased, the honor, dignity and justice of the nation would be lost forever" (pp. 405-06). It is also interesting that Washington lost one-half of his personal wealth during the Revolutionary War.

As president, George Washington earned \$25,000 a year. This is equivalent to about \$1 million in today's purchasing power. Considering this fact, does it make sense for us to only pay current presidents \$200,000 a year?

Finally, Washington made it clear that there was no difference between the public and the private president. He thought the president was a fully public person and that his every action should be judged by the American people. The nation would benefit greatly by getting back to this standard as quickly as possible.

This book is a good story of Washington's life. It would have been much better if Mr. Randall had been more careful with the facts. For a more historically accurate account, you must look elsewhere.

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BRUCE TAP, *Over Lincoln's Shoulder: The Committee on the Conduct of the War* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1998), xii, 301 + pp., \$39.95 cloth (ISBN 0-7006-0871-0).

More than a century ago, in *Congressional Government*, the first major analysis of the American national legislature, Woodrow Wilson penned a simple but somewhat startling statement: "The informing function of Congress should be preferred even to its legislative function." What Wilson had in mind regarding the "informing function" was not only what is now called oversight, but also the more formal and formidable exercise of investigatory power. Writing in the early 1880s, Wilson could count several past instances when committees of the House, the Senate, or both chambers jointly had been charged or especially created to exercise the full authority of Congress to probe on behalf of the American people and present them with findings or facts on some matter. These included inquiries into the defeat of the St. Clair expedition (1792), James Wilkinson and intrigues with Spain (1810), the burning of Washington (1814), Andrew Jackson's



invasion of Florida (1818-19), the Rip Rap imbroglio (1826-27), the Second Bank of the United States (1832), Sam Houston and the Indian rations contract (1832), the assault on Charles Sumner (1856), the Harper's Ferry incident (1859-60), the Buchanan administration (1860), the conduct of war activities (1861-65), reconstruction (1865-66), the impeachment of Andrew Johnson (1867), postbellum violence in the southern states (1871-72), and the Credit Mobilier scandal (1873). These investigations were conducted during an era when congressional committees were not of permanent status, when committee hearings were rather informal and infrequent, when witnesses were interviewed or gave testimony without relying on the benefit of legal counsel, when committee members were the primary investigators and had very little or no professional staff, and when publicity concerning such inquiries was provided by partisan newspapers (electronic news media appeared in 1848 when the Associated Press began operations using the telegraph).

The most durable of these investigatory panels was the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War. First established in late 1861 by Radical Republicans to immediately probe the Union military disasters at Bull Run and Edward's Ferry, the committee was broadly mandated "to inquire into the conduct of the present war" with "power to send for persons and papers, and to sit during the sessions of either House of Congress." Furthermore, the panel had a bicameral character, being "a joint committee of three members of the Senate, and four members of the House of Representatives." It would be reconstituted in 1864 for the duration of the 38th Congress (pp. 21-24).

During its three and a half years of investigation, the Joint Committee held 272 meetings; 164 of these occurred during the 37th Congress, and 108 took place during the next assembly. These gatherings were often freewheeling, although the majority party members carefully controlled the agenda and witness selections. Nonetheless, the full membership of the panel attended only 44 meetings of the committee during the 37th Congress and 13 meetings during the 38th. Belying these figures is an important operational consideration: oftentimes, two or more members were absent on committee business, taking testimony in locales distant from the capital.

Bruce Tap provides the first book-length account devoted exclusively to the Joint Committee. In the preface to his book, the author explains that he has attempted to present an assessment of the panel that steers a middle course between previous accounts. He finds the Joint Committee's Republican members "were principled reformers, opponents of slavery, and genuine patriots." While "there were several instances where the committee's activities did have a substantial negative impact on the northern war effort," it "did not stem from the members' devotion to fanatical principles, . . . but from a lack of firm understanding of military science" (p. x). Indeed, no member of the Joint Committee had military experience, and most of them considered the battlefield tactics of West Point graduates to be overly cautious, ineffective, and unheroic.

The Joint Committee's initial investigations of Union military failures and defeats were designed to ascertain the reasons for these debacles, to sort out the general officer corps, and to invigorate the timid Lincoln administration. Understanding the field charge and a few similar direct attack tactics, the panel's members preferred aggressive leaders of the armed forces who sought to liberate the slaves and punish the Confederacy

for rebelling against the Union. In this regard, for example, the restoration of John C. Fremont to an elevated position of command was championed, as was the removal of George B. McClellan from command of the Army of the Potomac. The result of these efforts, concludes Tap, were that "it often recommended generals, such as Fremont, who were subpar from a military standpoint" and "it contributed to (although it did not create) an unhealthy practice in Washington of allowing political considerations to influence military appointments" (p. 165).

In addition, "the committee's investigations, its leaks to the press, and its use of secret testimony to discredit generals such as McClellan certainly were instrumental in creating hostility between the army's West Point officers and the nation's civilian leaders." Finally, because of its collective ignorance of military science and preference for the heroic saber charge, "the committee tended to reinforce the unrealistic and simplistic notions of warfare that prevailed in the popular mind," writes Tap (pp. 165-66).

By contrast, the Joint Committee's probes of the Fort Pillow massacre, in which Union black troops were murdered and not allowed to surrender, and the condition of Union soldiers returned from Confederate prisons "were among its more positive achievements" (p. 208). Not only were the facts of each situation laid before the public, but the revelations served to rally a war-weary populace to render sufficient support to their civil and military leaders so that hostilities could be successfully brought to a close.

In conclusion, turning to the immediate legacy of the Joint Committee, Tap, commenting on the December 1865 establishment of the Joint Committee on Reconstruction to investigate conditions in the South and to consider appropriate reconstruction measures, observes that "this committee undoubtedly developed many of its strategies from the precedents established by" the war conduct panel (p. 253).

Acknowledging the negative effects the efforts and activities of the Joint Committee on the Conduct of the War had on the nation, the Union's civilian and military leadership, and the prosecution of the war, Tap closes his chronicle with a thoughtful benediction:

To the committee's credit, a number of its investigations exposed corruption, financial mismanagement, and crimes against humanity. The committee deserves praise not only for exposing these abuses but also for using such disclosures to invigorate northern public opinion and bolster the resolve to continue the war. Had the committee's work always been modeled on these investigations, there would be little debate about its positive, albeit minor, contribution to the Union war effort. (p. 255)

Tap has produced an excellent account, one providing historical detail and insights concerning the Lincoln administration, the Civil War, congressional investigation, and the nineteenth-century congressional and presidential institutions.

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